



Washington State Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program Annual Report 1999

January 18, 2000

Level of program participation:

As of November 24 1999, FSA Washington State records show the following:

55 Offers initiated

6 Approved contacts totaling 80.4 acres

Currently, FSA offices are accounting for offers and contracts. The State does not formally report landowner interest and calls to local offices. 10,000 brochures were sent out statewide which led to many calls and interest around the state. Due to the 4-year window of the program, the review of the buffer standard, and possible federal program changes that would increase program benefits, many landowners have chosen to wait and see what happens. Lack of program participation is drawing attention from the State legislature.

Annual monitoring program:

Development of an annual monitoring will be done in this year, in conjunction with several other State initiatives to inventory and monitor salmonids and limiting factors on their survival. Among these are the "Limiting Factors Analysis" which the Conservation Commission is currently completing with 7 full-time fisheries biologists. This analysis is identifying the limiting factors on salmonid survival and reproduction in the major salmonid bearing watersheds of the State. The analysis is already identifying loss of streamside habitat as a major limiting factor in most watersheds.

In reality, there will be a very limited capability to provide meaningful monitoring results, based strictly on CREP Riparian Buffers, in the early years of the program. The primary benefits the buffers will provide for salmonids is shade and the corresponding reduction in water temperature, which is a limiting factor for salmonid reproduction in most of the waterways targeted by the program. Sporadic enrollment, and the time needed for woody species growth, will not lead to early water temperature reductions. Washington's CREP has always been envisioned as providing a long-term benefit that will take several years to be realized.

Habitat Comparison:

The agreement between the State and USDA asks for comparison of salmon habitat characteristics and population trends in streams where there is significant enrollment in the program with similar streams where program participation is not significant. Currently, no habitat has been planted and there is not data to draw any conclusions of improvement in habitat as related to salmonid population. Even when enrollment and habitat plantings have been completed, this will be difficult if not impossible to measure for many years.

Non-federal CREP program expenditures:

State funds expended for CREP ending June 30, 1999 (Note: The State's fiscal year is July 1 – June 30.)

\$518,866 30 CREP Conservation Districts: Funds used for technical assistance, public outreach, and training and equipment relevant to program work.

\$141,103 Public Outreach program, contract to marketing firm, brochures, videos, posters, print advertisement, radio advertisements, and landowner survey

\$208,088 Conservation Commission for staff, support, and equipment for CREP

\$11,640 Contracts for GIS and database services - map development, digitization, database development, and equipment

\$879,697 Total expended for FY 2000 – Technical Assistance

There was no state money distributed for cost share as no projects had been started. The 5 million was re-appropriated to future years of the program

State funds budgeted for CREP for July 1, 99 – June 30, 2000 Technical Assistance

\$744,637 31 CREP Conservation Districts: Funds to be used for technical assistance, public outreach, training and equipment relevant to program work.

\$ 25,000 Public Outreach program and marketing activities.

\$132,500 Conservation Commission for staff, support, and equipment for CREP

\$ 43,500 Contracts for GIS and database services - map development, digitization, database development, and equipment

\$ 54,363 Contingency to be used for technical assistance - unexpected expenditures

\$1,000,000 Total budgeted for FY 2000 – Technical Assistance

State funds budgeted for CREP for July 1, 99 – June 30 00 Cost Share

\$3,949,495 31 CREP Conservation Districts: Funds for 37.5% match of costs for landowners

\$900,505 Contingency to be used for cost-share for landowners

\$150,000 Conservation Commission administration costs

\$5,000,000 Total budgeted for FY 2000 – Cost Share

CREP activities:

1. Marketing program

A public outreach and information program including brochures, a video, radio commercials, and print advertisement were part of the program developed. State funds provided the funding and a marketing firm with conservation project experience were hired to lead the effort. Survey of potential participants was also part of the contract.

2. Statewide Training

Statewide training involving Conservation Commission – CREP coordinator, FSA and NRCS personnel, held 4 training sessions for Conservation District and USDA Service Center personnel. Four follow-up sessions were held to answer process and procedural questions.

3. Stream eligibility

The Conservation commission and local Conservation districts led mapping parties with local, knowledgeable personnel to further identify eligible lands for the program and update maps for use in local offices to aid in eligibility determination.

4. Buffer negotiations / ESA

The State objective of providing a buffer that complies with both ESA and CWA requirements required the NRCS buffer to be reviewed within the State. This process is still ongoing and until the standard has been completed, signups will be limited to landowners desiring to signup the maximum allowable width.

Program Recommendations:

1. More State control

Landowners want and deserve reasonable timely answers to questions. Having to wait for months while minor program changes are considered is not practical or acceptable. The decision needs to be made in the State at the State FSA Committee or in the local county committee meetings. Watersheds are unique entities that vary greatly in geography, climate, vegetation, land-use - -and need site specific solutions made at the lowest level possible in the most effective time frame. Specific examples of where decisions were not allowed at the State and local level and their consequences include the following:

A. Eligible area

The knowledgeable personnel best handle determination of eligible area in the affected watershed. There are vastly different situations in watersheds throughout the state. Allowing the determination of what is eligible at the watershed following general guidelines will prove to be the most effective. Feedback and criticism from local areas makes clear that the current definition using SASSI is limiting and does not address some critical areas that need to be included. Work is in process to better define the program areas and how to determine eligibility.

B. Cost-share – tree protectors

The exclusion of conifers in tree-protectors is not acceptable and does not make sense for our program. This is clearly a decision that needs to be made at a state level. We are going on 3 months in trying to resolve this issue following USDA procedures. To pass such an exclusion once the program was underway has not been helpful from both the landowner and state perspective.

C. Soil rental rate changes vs. value of the habitat

The use of soil rental rates has caused feedback from several directions. In areas that little or no CRP has been used, there was little or no attempt to keep soil rental rates current. However, CREP is a good fit in these areas, but federal rules limit the amount of change in the rates. The State, in essence, gets penalized for being an efficient manager by not doing needless work. Much criticism has been received from landowners and local officials about both the current rates and the policy to change them. There is also the basic question of how does the soil rental rate relate to the value of the habitat that is desired. This is a great question and one not easily answered except for these are the program rules. Little flexibility has been given to the State committee in regards to this question.

2. More responsiveness

Decisions that effect CREP have taken an unexpected amount of time to resolve. There seems to be a desire to promote how flexible and effective the program is, but the actual changes move at an unacceptable pace. There has not been support in getting the work to move and little enthusiasm in completing the work. Examples are listed below.

A. Biological Assessment

The BA for CREP is moving very slowly and there has been little help from USDA to hasten the process. Efforts to move the process have come from in-state with limited success. The result is that no chemical application can be used while the review is in process. Landowners will not complete the contract without the certainty of being able to use chemicals to control invasive as part of the technical recommendations in the plan for the landowner.

B. Program changes

We have been aware for several months of proposed program changes that would benefit both the program and the landowner. These changes were proposed due to feedback from participating States and what was necessary to help increase signup. The program will have increased participation with higher cost-share rates and incentives. In addition, higher cost-share rates would allow the State to use existing cost-share dollars for incentives and longer-term contracts. Inclusion of orchards and perennial crops is needed to fully implement the State's objectives for the program.

3. Communication

The State hired a program coordinator for CREP. Main duties have been public outreach, education of districts, and coordination of the program with State agencies. Daily communication with FSA has been helpful in implementing the program and answering questions.